

Reputational Politics and the Symbolic Accretion of John Brown in Kansas

Chris Post

Traveling south on United States Highway 169 from the Kansas City metropolitan region, drivers are confronted with a sign begging them to stop in the small town of Osawatomie and visit the preserved frontier home of famed abolitionist John Brown (Figure 1). The sign draws attention to the memorialization of the man and his legend, a memorialization that has been evident in Osawatomie alone for 100 years now and extends to other locations throughout the state. It also indicates an area of cumulative response to Brown: a park with other elements that has been dedicated to this historic figure. It does not, however, note either the contestation surrounding Brown's life and image or the debates underneath the history and landscape surrounding his legacy throughout the state and even country.

John Brown is one of the most contested figures in American history, locally in Kansas and nationally due to his time in New York, Ohio, and West Virginia.¹ Debates over Brown's meaning have been carried out



Figure 1. Highway sign enticing travelers to visit the John Brown State Park in Osawatomie, Kansas. (photo by author)

Chris Post is at Kent State University's Stark Campus in North Canton, Ohio. *Historical Geography* Volume 37 (2009): 92-113. ©2009, Historical Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers.

fervently in historical literature for decades. This discourse has effectively blurred the original intentions behind the creation of so many landscapes dedicated to Brown. Americans now are not sure what to think about the man and his legend. Osawatomie's landscape in particular has undergone a process of evolution that has led to the augmentation of Brown's legend despite resistance. It also parallels the historic fluctuations in Brown's image and reputation as both a praised and martyred abolitionist and a crazed fanatical murderer. This ebb and flow has occurred concurrently with other social movements in American memory, civil rights, and race relations. Two more Kansas landscapes are analyzed here to further illustrate these processes: the African American neighborhood of Quindaro in Kansas City, and the Topeka Statehouse.

Three essential issues surround these landscapes constructed in memory of John Brown. First, they exemplify how the reputations of historic figures are frequently debated on the landscape through material culture, transforming the landscape into a dialogue and a process of cultural means and meaning called "reputational politics."² Second, it highlights the crucial involvement of "symbolic accretion" in this process of symbolically reinforcing a figure's reputation as it is communicated through the landscape.³ Third, it provides yet another example of how such politicized discourse underlines the ambivalence with which guerrilla warfare and those involved with it are remembered on the American landscape.⁴ Before jumping into the analysis, however, I review Brown's life and subsequent debates over his meaning in American history. I then further discuss reputational politics, symbolic accretion, and their interaction in creating ambivalent landscapes.

John Brown and "Bleeding Kansas"

John Brown came to Kansas Territory in 1855 as part of a relatively small, but politically powerful, immigrant group from New England bent on ending the westward expansion of slavery that led to the Civil War.⁵ Born in Connecticut, Brown made extended stops in New York and Ohio before following his sons to the Osawatomie area of eastern Kansas. He was a religiously righteous abolitionist. Many people believed his views and actions belonged to a mentally unstable person, while others simply believed in him. Soon after Brown's arrival, he became involved in the widespread regional violence of "Bleeding Kansas," the mostly guerrilla war over slavery's status on the frontier. Brown was initially provoked by the bloodless "Wakarusa War" south of Lawrence, Kansas, during the summer of 1855, when he rode north to help defend the town. He again rode to Lawrence upon its sacking in May 1856 by Sheriff Samuel Jones.⁶

Brown immediately sought revenge for these events in Lawrence and quickly took the matter into his own hands. Late in the evening of May 24, 1856, he, with help from his sons and son-in-law, brutally killed by sword and gun five known slavery advocates along Pottawatomie Creek west of Osawatomie. Brown's group asked for directions to the house of a

known William Sherman at the home of their first three victims: James, William, and Drury Doyle. The fourth victim was Allen Wilkinson, who was asked for directions, but also if he was a Union sympathizer. He lied and answered yes (he and the Doyles were from Tennessee). Wilkinson, however, could not save himself. Finally, Brown and his sons, calling themselves the Northern Army, found William "Dutch Henry" Sherman (the German immigrant to whose residence they were asking directions) and killed him at his home.⁷

In retaliation for this and other actions against proslavery citizens, Missouri regiment Captain H. C. Pate brought his troops into Kansas near present-day Baldwin City with the intent of finding and killing Brown. Two small Kansas groups, led by Brown, combined and found Pate's group first. On June 4, the two groups clashed in what became known as the Battle of Black Jack. The surprise breakfast attack on Pate's encampment worked, despite Kansans being outnumbered. Pate's famous quote, "I went to take Old Brown and Old Brown took me," explains well Brown's elusiveness during the time.⁸

Violence came directly to Osawatomie first on August 7 when Brown himself actually burned a neighborhood in the town that hosted a pro-slavery colony from Georgia.⁹ On August 30 four hundred Missourians again rode in looking for Brown's cabin outside Osawatomie. The Battle of Osawatomie commenced and cannon-wielding Missourians burned the town. Free State defenders under Brown quickly retreated but lost only five fighters, including Brown's son Frederick, and killed thirty-two Missourians.

Brown spent a majority of 1857 and 1858 outside Kansas, with one exception. He made a retaliatory raid into Missouri, freeing several slaves in December 1858 in northwest Vernon County.¹⁰ The Federal government hanged Brown one year later at Charles Town, Virginia (now West Virginia), for his treasonous raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry. To many Americans, John Brown became a martyr that day. The landscape of the small town on the Potomac has never been the same. Memorials for and against the cause of John Brown have been erected on, deleted from, and transformed throughout the landscape.¹¹

Landscape, memory, and reputational politics

My goal here is to answer these questions: Does the landscape capture the historical debate around John Brown's brief time in Kansas? If so, how? And, to what extent is ambivalence towards these events expressed through said landscapes? Clearly, a landscape in memory of Brown exists, as the mere highway sign that opened this paper proves. Closer examination reveals that there has been a debate surrounding his legacy among local and regional citizens and politicians. This debate has permeated onto the landscape through what geographer Derek Alderman, building upon the work of Gary Fine, calls "reputational politics," an "approach that focuses on the socially constructed and contested nature of commemorating

historical figures and the discursive rivalries that underlie the memorialization of these figures."¹²

Why go through all of this effort? Those who produce the landscape through their capital become known as "reputational entrepreneurs" and take on the responsibility of interpreting the past.¹³ Much power resides in this position, as command over interpreting the past impacts our present and future identities.

Scholars have long been interested in the social and political control over memory and its subsequent powers.¹⁴ As Paul Connerton states, "control of a society's memory conditions the hierarchy of power."¹⁵ Regardless of public or private affiliation, the people responsible for funding a monument do so with a specific purpose. Their decisions affect every element of a monument: its form and function, location, the language used to convey meaning, any performances associated with the event and scene, and the timing of its development and presentation. In the end, the created landscape is molded into the particular shape and identity selected for it by a highly (if only subconsciously) biased group of politicians, public servants, or citizens.

Much of the work on reputational politics and entrepreneurs in geography has focused on racialized landscapes in the American South.¹⁶ Alderman's own work focuses on the process as it applies to Martin Luther King Jr. and the many streets that have been named in the civil rights giant's memory.¹⁷ Jonathan Leib also dissects this issue in an analysis of the representations of General Robert E. Lee and tennis legend Arthur Ashe along Canal Walk in Richmond, Virginia.¹⁸ However, this process does not happen alone. In the case of Brown, a critical component of this debate is the "symbolic accretion" of his image at these places, particularly Osawatomie, despite his short tenure there.¹⁹

Symbolic accretion, noted by both Owen Dwyer and Kenneth Foote, is the "appending of commemorative elements onto already existing memorials."²⁰ This process puts a premium on the location of a monument and its visibility to the public. The overall significance of the landscape can increase with each additional tangible piece of memory added, regardless of its original purpose. As Dwyer states, these spaces become a "conduit for ongoing debate" due to their crucial location and are "susceptible to rewriting and appropriation."²¹ This process in part defines what is experienced in Osawatomie and contributes much to the side of the debate that reflects John Brown's works as positive and necessary for change in nineteenth century America. But this image of Brown has not always been the prominent one.

The literary debates

Since his death, scholars have debated the impact and justifications of John Brown's tenure in Kansas as well as in the Northeast. Historian Craig Miner observes that John Brown has long posed this dilemma within Kansas, and really all of American history: "what to make of the

public identification of the state with this man and his actions."²² On the eastern seaboard during his lifetime, Brown was respected as an ardent abolitionist. He met with Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Emerson, Theodore Parker, and Frederick Douglass, all of who were impressed with Brown's fiery attitude against slavery and his devotion to stopping its westward movement. He was funded by the "Secret Six," a group of upper class New Englanders who sent him funding for his work in Kansas. Historian Nicole Etcheson claims that these men and others actually viewed Brown's tactics as "superior to the free-state party's use of nonresistance."²³ According to Fine, their views, broadcast to a large eastern audience, helped to create Brown's legendary status.²⁴ Though not the original inspiration for the song "John Brown's Body," he came to be known as its subject after his hanging. Union soldiers sang the motivating tune all the way to their final Civil War victory.

Brown's share of detractors paralleled this praise. Many claimed he was insane, though this has been viewed as ideological, not psychological.²⁵ Historian James Malin viewed Brown's life as equal parts myth and fact.²⁶ Another regional scholar, Leverett Spring, claimed Brown was merely parenthetical in the history of Kansas, while Missourians simply saw him as a "professional murderer."²⁷ Governor Charles Robinson and even President Abraham Lincoln perhaps summarized Brown best when they criticized his violence in the territory, stating that it did not mesh well with his abolitionist motives.²⁸ Free Stater Eli Thayer proclaimed, "John Brown was an unspeakable curse to the Free-State party."²⁸

More recently, John Brown has been viewed in a relatively balanced, if not noble, light. His legacy was summarized this way by David S. Reynolds, who claimed the abolitionist killed slavery, though it was not dead at his passing; he sparked, but did not cause, the Civil War; and he seeded, but did not bring about, American civil rights.³⁰ Stephen B. Oates, agreeing in principle with this conclusion, suggested that Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry "ignited a sectional explosion" amongst the states.³¹

This evidence suggests that Brown's image and legend has been mediated through time. Generally, political dissidents are not afforded much favor from the general public. As Fine discussed, this has not been the case with Brown.³² His personal connections to New England allowed his reputation to be built in a more positive fashion, resting upon his martyrdom over ending slavery regardless of those he killed to make his point.³³ Indeed, Brown's actions did influence more commitments to the abolitionist cause in the North while at the same time in the South it provided more evidence towards an eminent attack. After some time, historians such as Malin became more critical of Brown's actions, his motives, and his mental stability. However, with the surge of civil rights during the postwar era, Brown's actions were again viewed more favorably.

In light of this scholarly debate over Brown's impact on American society, let us now look at the material evidence of a similar debate that has taken place in three Kansas landscapes—Osawatimie, the Quindaro neighborhood of Kansas City, and the Topeka Statehouse—in their exem-

plification of reputational politics, symbolic accretion, and their interaction in forming commemorative landscapes.

Osawatomie

Osawatomie's landscape contains several memorialized sites: John Brown Memorial Park and its associated cabin, gate, statue and plaques, the Battle of Osawatomie Soldiers' Monument, and the Frederick Brown Marker (Figure 2). These elements build to a crescendo of identity made possible through symbolic accretion.

It took only a few years for people in Osawatomie to build a strong connection to Brown. The first monument erected in Osawatomie was a marble obelisk dedicated to the casualties of the Battle of Osawatomie (Figure 3). Several "old pioneers" in the Osawatomie area needed 21 years (relatively fast for the time period) to donate the money for this "Soldiers' Monument." Former Governor Robinson dedicated the marker on August 30, 1877, at the site of a mass burial.³⁴ Reports vary on the cost of the eleven-foot memorial; two figures are \$250 and \$400.³⁵ The pioneers placed the monument at the corner of 9th and Main streets, now in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

Although the location of the monument and its initiation of the accretion process is critical, its text is perhaps even more telling. The south side of the monument states plainly that it is dedicated to John Brown's "heroism," in that he "conquered slavery on the scaffold" when he died in Charles Town. This dedication is ironic for two reasons. First, these local

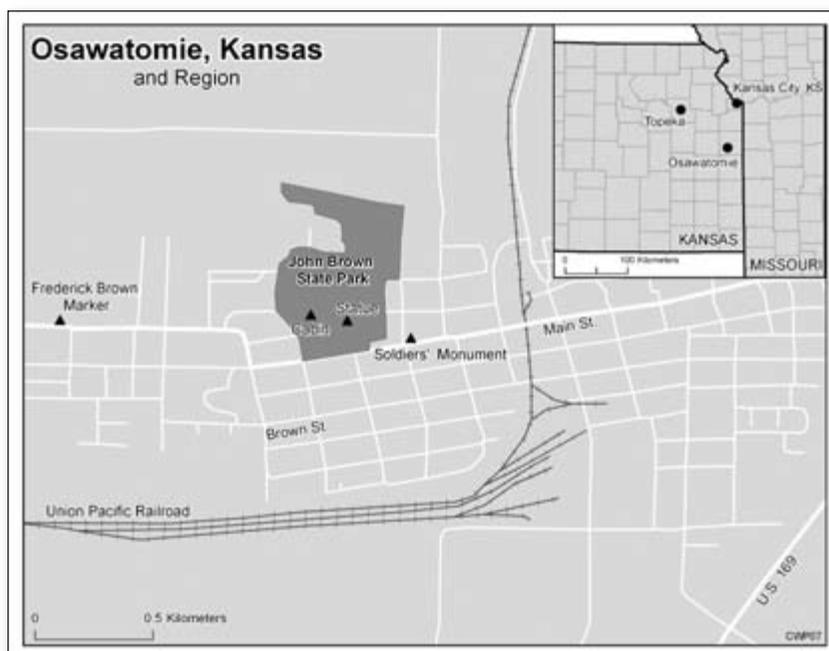


Figure 2. Map of monuments in Osawatomie, Kansas. (map by author)



Figure 3. The Soldiers' Monument at Main and 9th Streets. This is also the burial ground for the five casualties from Brown's local force. (photo by author)

men may not have died if it were not for Brown and his violence. Second, Brown, though he fought in the battle, was not one of the five dead volunteers. His son Frederick died and is memorialized here and on a separate monument in town. Contrary to the popular name of this marker, it indeed initiated this location as crucial to the formation of Brown's identity in the city.

A series of monuments all build upon this momentum. Together they comprise the John Brown Memorial Park, a state historic site. The Woman's Relief Corps (WRC), an auxiliary group to the Grand Army of the Republic, put forth the effort in celebrating "Osawatomie Brown" here. Organized in 1883 in Denver, Colorado, the WRC's goal "is to perpetuate the memory of the Grand Army of the Republic." It retains a current mem-

bership of 2,360 and now operates under the umbrella of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.³⁶

The WRC's local work started in 1907, when it approached the United States Congress about purchasing the grounds of the Battle of Osawatomie to create a park named after John Brown. The legislature, "bitterly opposed" to funding any more national parks, struck down the plea.³⁷ To help, local citizen J. B. Remington personally bought the land for \$1,800 and held it until the WRC collected the money needed to reserve and dedicate the land. The group raised 35-cent donations from each member and also sold photographs of John Brown and cloth sunflower petals to area residents. Mayor L. O. Madison himself pledged \$300 for the cause.³⁸

President Theodore Roosevelt dedicated the John Brown Memorial Park on August 31, 1910. The ceremony featured 30,000 attendants, and a speech by Roosevelt that exemplifies Brown's contested memory. Upon recommendation by prominent *Emporia Gazette* editor William Allen White, the former President hardly mentioned Brown.³⁹ Instead, he delivered a speech of general populist tone, intended primarily to help boost the approval of President Taft.⁴⁰ Another conflict came from within the WRC. Member Minnie D. Morgan opposed the dedication of the grounds for Brown since "he never lived on [the ground]....No Free State men were injured and no blood was ever spilled at that [particular] location [of the reserved grounds]."⁴¹ Local Union veterans were so upset they initiated plans for another ceremony, but it never came into fruition.⁴² In 1911, the WRC donated the grounds to the State of Kansas via Senate Bill 427.

During his stay in Kansas, Brown lived in the cabin home of his stepbrother by marriage, Samuel Adair. In 1912, Osawatomie resident D. E. Beatty led a group of citizens to move a cabin into the park (Figure 4). This



Figure 4. The Adair Cabin inside a "pergola" donated by the State of Kansas in 1928. (photo by author)

cabin was still standing in its original location outside of town when the parkland was dedicated. Subsequently, locals deconstructed the cabin piece-by-piece and labeled each so that they could be reassembled in original condition. The State of Kansas immediately took possession of the cabin and has since run it as the John Brown Museum. Park officials added a gate over the entrance to the grounds on July 14, 1913.⁴³

In 1919, two cannons and several cannon balls from World War I were donated to the city for placement within the park. The additions did not last long, however, for in 1942 they were donated back for the World War homeland effort. The *Ottawa (KS) Herald* reported the cannons would yield over fifteen thousand pounds of scrap metal.⁴⁴

State involvement in the John Brown Memorial Park grew in the 1920s. Six thousand dollars for a protective “pergola” over the cabin were appropriated on May 11, 1927 (Figure 4).⁴⁵ The state erected the structure in 1928 and included a dated cornerstone. Running the park and cabin eventually became a joint venture between the state and the city of Osawatomie. The city of Osawatomie took care of park maintenance, while the state (through the Kansas State Historical Society) cared for the cabin, museum, and immediate grounds.⁴⁶

In 1933, locals decided that the death of Frederick Brown during the Battle of Osawatomie deserved recognition beyond the Soldiers’ Monument of 1877. They decided to place a plaque to be placed on a large stone where Frederick Brown died. This was sited at the original location of the John Brown cabin, which Frederick was defending, near what is now the western edge of town along the John Brown Memorial Highway (Figure 5). Mrs. Charles S. Adair donated the plaque and dedicated it to both Frederick and the cabin home.

One of the most celebrated monuments in Osawatomie is the statue of John Brown in his namesake park (Figure 6). This life-size replica cost \$6,000, was raised by the WRC, and was created by George Fite Waters, an American artist living in Paris. WRC members Ada Remington and Anna January spearheaded this effort. Governor Alfred Landon dedicated the statue on May 9, 1935, Brown’s 135th birthday, with Assistant Secretary of War Henry Woodring attending. This monument nearly followed the same fate as the World War I cannons and munitions in 1942, only seven years after its unveiling. The statue ultimately survived, but this issue sharply divided the city, illustrating shifting emotions towards Brown.⁴⁷

Exclusively local movements (locals initiated the John Brown Park before its transfer to the state) to memorialize Brown in Osawatomie ended with the statue’s dedication. Indeed, this monument provided a capstone to his landscape memory in the small Kansas town. The focus of civil rights during the 1960s helped usher in a new era of memorialization on a national scale, and the Osawatomie landscape received some additional attention from this movement. In 1969, the United States Department of the Interior and National Park Service, in coordination with the State of Kansas and city of Osawatomie, donated a plaque to the John Brown Memorial Park in recognition of the city’s historical identity and establishment of the



Figure 5. The Frederick Brown Monument and Original Site of the John Brown Cabin. (photo by author)



Figure 6. The John Brown Statue in John Brown Park. Several plaques surround the monument and cabin located about 50 feet from one another. (photo by author)



Figure 7. The plaque donated by the U.S. Department of the Interior near the John Brown Cabin. (photo by author)

park as a national historic site (Figure 7). The plaque was dedicated to the efforts of all Kansans and reads: “The Blood that Flowed in Kansas Before and During the Civil War Nourished the Twin Trees of Liberty and Union.” Similar to President Roosevelt’s dedication speech of the battleground, the federal marker makes no direct mention of John Brown and his activities in Kansas Territory.

U. S. Representative Joe Skubitz of Walnut in Crawford County came up with the idea of the “Twin Trees” monument (and placed three others in his district of southeast Kansas). Skubitz served on the U. S. National Parks committee and more easily obtained funding for his home state. The legislation for all of the Twin Trees monuments passed in 1965 and originally cost \$805,700. Another two million dollars were added to the project in 1976.⁴⁸

Osawatomie’s memorials share a very important trait: a prominent position in the town’s public space, particularly along the primary route of Main Street and the John Brown Memorial Highway (connected by Parker Avenue). It could be said these landscapes compose the town’s public space. Considered separately, the markers reflect a variety of meanings; some are rebuilt structures (the cabin and pergola) while others were unveiled with ceremony (the Soldiers’ Monument, park, and statue), and others are quite subtle (the national historic site plaque, Frederick Brown marker). When conceived as a holistic landscape, however, these monuments appear to come to a crescendo of memory that consecrates the memory of John Brown and his activity in and around Osawatomie via symbolic accretion. This is all, however, despite the destruction of the town twice, once by Brown himself, and the other by Missourians looking for him. Indeed, throughout all of these narratives of the individual monuments, a dialogue took place that balanced the benefits and burdens of materially remembering John Brown’s activities in and around Osawatomie. In sum,

citizens and officials politicized, in effect sanctioning, the cumulative impact of these events through the public landscape.

But how did this jump in perception take place? Looking more closely, Osawatomie becomes a textbook case of invented traditions.⁴⁹ While he was alive, Brown's image was popular and forming, yet still indistinct, with hatred coming from some people and praise from others. His hanging at Charles Town is the critical event for Bowden's step two, myth creation. For Kansas, a territory looking for a positive identity in its quest for statehood, this meant an opportunity to attach itself to the ideal of abolition. The deaths of eyewitnesses to Brown's violence and apparent insanity provide the third stage of invented tradition. During this stage, the state and federal governments were becoming more involved in the development of Brown's image through increased efforts at his park, regardless of complete historical truth. Locally, the John Brown statue was dedicated, offering a more direct and personal memorialization of Brown, not merely a name attached to the Soldiers' Monument and park. The dedication of John Brown Park as a state historic site cemented the universalization of his legend, the fourth stage of invented traditions, making his previously treasonous actions worthy of respect and praise.

The historical and economic geographies of Osawatomie provide context for this invention. Osawatomie first became a viable community in 1863, when it was selected for the state's mental hospital. The institution brought with it 700 jobs plus auxiliary services for a growing population. In 1887, the town grew again when the Missouri Pacific Railroad sited a repair shop and division point there.⁵⁰ Today, the railroad jobs are all gone. The hospital does operate, albeit with a decreased number of employees. The result is a community, at best, in the middle of an economic shift. Located off the interstate routes, it has not grown like neighboring communities Edgerton and Wellsville.

Also crucial, to both the question here and Osawatomie's economy, is tourism. Lifting John Brown onto a significant pedestal, with help from state and federal agencies, has helped the town to survive by bringing in much-needed visitors and their dollars. The John Brown Historic Site, housed inside the cabin, averaged 3,000 visitors from fiscal year 2000 through 2004, a significant impact for a community of only 4,500 residents.⁵¹ John Brown's legend clearly helps the economy of, and has come to define, in large part, his former hometown.

The antebellum and Civil War violence in Kansas occurred entirely south of the Kansas River and hugged the Missouri border. John Brown's influence and mythical standing, however, went beyond these boundaries. What has become of Brown's immortalization beyond Osawatomie? Are they consistent with these same processes?

The Quindaro statue

Whereas the timing and accretion of John Brown's memorialization in Osawatomie is needed to uncover its critical reflection of the Civil

Rights Movement, one site in Kansas more clearly reflects the African-American perspective of Brown's impact in Kansas: the Quindaro neighborhood of Kansas City. This area has always been predominantly African American and today is over 85 percent Black, according to the 2000 United States Census.⁵² In fact, the original town site was established on the Missouri River as a safe portal for Blacks and abolitionists who wished to make Kansas their home.⁵³ It also was noted as a stop on the Underground Railroad, which Brown helped to organize. Land promoter Abelard Guthrie, with help from Governor Robinson, established the town on January 1, 1857, and named it after his Wyandotte wife. Colloquially, the name meant "in union there is strength," although its literal translation was "bundle of sticks."⁵⁴

According to historian Alan Farley, the city of Quindaro declined quickly. The Panic of 1857 curtailed investment and, as the Free State Party assumed better command of Kansas politics, an alternative entrance to Kansas City became unnecessary. Additionally, the Civil War caused young men who would have led the town's economy to leave and fight.⁵⁵ Consequently, Kansas City, Kansas, expanded west and incorporated Quindaro.

In 1910, upon the wishes of Episcopal Bishop Abraham Grant, Wyandotte County citizens donated ten to fifty cents each for the \$2,000 total needed to build a local statue of John Brown. Although Brown had never set foot on the Quindaro site, the bishop wanted to commemorate his importance to abolitionism within his community.⁵⁶ On June 8, 1911, officials unveiled the statue during commencement exercises at Western University (formerly Freedman's College), an early Historically Black College operated by the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. The Italian marble monument stood fourteen-feet tall and the front pedestal read, "Erected to the memory of John Brown by a grateful people" (Figure 8).

Western University's final class graduated in 1943, and for nearly twenty years the statue stood amid a decaying neighborhood. In 1962, locals made a controversial proposal to move the monument. Interestingly, the arguments did not vary by race or political affiliation, but rather by personal opinion on the preferred site of relocation. James H. Brown, a trustee of the local AME church, wanted the statue in more public space. He stated, "We should bring the statue into the city where it can be seen by hundreds of people everyday rather than a few who see it everyday. Located downtown, it would give Kansas City, Kansas, a stronger identity and show what Kansans have stood for."⁵⁷ City dignitary and former school district Superintendent F. L. Schlagle cautioned against such a public site, however, saying, "Complete agreement would be necessary...John Brown was a controversial figure but he is a historical figure."⁵⁸ Ernest Gayden, who lived close to the statue and served as the president of the John Brown Monument and Historical Association, held a third view. He believed the significance of the statue would be diminished if people moved it from the original Quindaro site, a position near a tunnel thought, but not proven, to be part of the Underground Railroad.⁵⁹

Finally, in 1964, volunteers moved the statue, but only a meager



Figure 8. The John Brown monument in the Quindaro neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas, stands in obscurity. (photo by author)

fifty feet to the corner of 28th Street and Sewell. In the process of the move, they found the statue's nose broken. It was assumed that vandals got to it before the transfer and a protective chicken-wire cage was placed around the monument. The Wyandotte County Historical Society added plaques of historical text about the histories of Quindaro, Western University, and the Underground Railroad.⁶⁰ Ernest Gayden had hoped to receive public support for protection and further marking, but no definitive connection exists between his wishes and the historical society's action.

Confrontation over the statue's importance occurred again in 1991 when a local waste-management company proposed a landfill near Quindaro. Residents spoke out against the placement of the landfill, in part because of its location near the city's Missouri River water supply, but also on behalf of the statue. Kansas Governor Joan Finney signed a bill preventing construction of the landfill, saving the statue.⁶¹ Similar to the situation in Osawatomie, the state did not establish the monument, but it did help to preserve it and, therefore, Brown's memory on the landscape.

Several characteristics separate the Quindaro monument from those in Osawatomie. First, it illustrates nicely the "scaling" of Brown's reputation in the African American community, further shaping his image.⁶² Using Martin Luther King, Jr. as an example, Alderman claims that geographic scale, "constitutes and structures the politics of commemorating the past."⁶³ Similarly to King, Brown's presence on the memorialized landscape has essentially been "scaled down" by its location in a small

African-American neighborhood. In comparison to Osawatomie's state park, the statue in Quindaro does not represent the entire community, mostly due to its position away from any prominent public location, as proposed by some citizens. The Quindaro statue also is hard to find, and visitors would rarely stumble upon it (as was James H. Brown's argument). Second, the accretion of plaques commemorating the history of the neighborhood, in particular its site along the Underground Railroad, further reinforces the importance of Brown to this African American community.

In addition, Kansas City is not as desperate for tourism revenue as is Osawatomie. It has other revenue and job resources from being the county seat and other new economic developments anchored by Kansas Speedway and several shopping and entertainment businesses (the future includes a Hard Rock Casino). This expansion alone brought an estimated \$610 million of revenue through sales and taxes to the county in 2007.⁶⁴

In Quindaro, the Brown statue is dedicated without the burden of historical conscience. The distance between Quindaro and Osawatomie provides a metaphorical buffer between the memory of his violence and the principles of social justice that Brown stood for. The statue's nondescript location does not raise debate for a large audience. It was built by, and stands for the identity of the Quindaro community. For these local citizens, almost entirely African American, the Underground Railroad and Brown's freeing of slaves along it, is of utmost importance, and the violence can be situated as a sacrifice. Quindaro's statue remembers this John Brown, not the "Osawatomie Brown" who killed five innocent citizens along Pottawatomie Creek or who enticed proslavery Missourians to raid the community.

Thus far, we have covered two landscapes that are quite different from one another. One is set purely and in the public sphere; the second is tucked away in an African-American neighborhood. Both landscapes, however, were scrutinized and went through the court of public opinion. Our final landscape takes this theme to an entirely different, and literally a political arena.

The Kansas statehouse mural

No landscape dedicated to the memory of John Brown sets a better stage for reputational politics than the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka. The state's commissioning of a mural in 1937 brought new insight into how Kansans believe John Brown should be remembered, for this effort was funded purely with public money. The painting is significant also for its representation of the Kansas landscape, its position in Topeka's political scene, and its exposure to a large number of people, a self-reported 147,000 statehouse visitors in 2003.⁶⁵

The project began when a group of newspaper editors, including William Allen White and in cooperation with Governor Walter Huxman, commissioned native John Steuart Curry for \$10,000 to paint the inside halls of the capitol rotunda.⁶⁶ Curry, from nearby Jefferson County, was al-

ready popular for his paintings of the rural heartland. His skills and representation of pastoral settings made him one in a triumvirate of “regionalist” painters along with Thomas Hart Benton from Missouri and Grant Wood of Iowa.

Curry was somewhat gruff about criticism he had received on previous works, saying, “They have Kansas. They hardly need paintings....” Regarding the new work, he said he wanted “to paint this war with nature and I want to paint the things I feel as native of Kansas.”⁶⁷ To this end, Curry planned a three-part work to emphasize the state’s eras of settlement, homesteading, and agriculture. John Brown became the focus of the “settlement” portion, and criticism started as early as Curry’s sketches in 1939. The author rebelled and cut the project short, completing only the first two parts. The section including Brown was called *Tragic Prelude* (Figure 9).

Interpretation and judgment of the painting occurred immediately. Brown, it was thought, looked too fanatical. In the painting, Brown’s eyes are as big as quarters as he holds a Bible in his left hand and a rifle in his right. Two dead and bleeding soldiers, interpreted as brothers, lie at his feet, while a freedman holds a rifle in a protective pose in front of Brown. A tornado spins in the background as flames and smoke billow. One’s blood pressure cannot help but rise upon viewing the image. That was exactly the problem, despite the painting’s honesty and realism.

One legislator, Martin Van Buren Van De Mark of Concordia, commented, “John Brown was just a crazy old coot. He was nothing but a rascal, a thief, and a murderer...whose memory should not be perpetuated in Kansas history.”⁶⁸ Others appreciated the work. Senator Albert Cole of Holton said, “I think they’re swell.” F. H. Roberts, editor of the *Oskaloosa Independent*, agreed, claiming, “Kansas history has been violent and punctuated with bloodshed and cyclones.”⁶⁹



Figure 9. *Tragic Prelude* at the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka. (image courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)

Blood on Brown's hand caused conflict. Curry meant it as a symbol of Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. The problem for some was that Harper's Ferry was not in Kansas, and Brown was not a Kansas original. One such group was the Kansas Council of Women, which led a movement against the removal of marble tiles from the rotunda to make room for the work, effectively stopping Curry one part short of completion. The group felt its decision was honorable: "The murals do not portray the true Kansas....Rather than revealing a law abiding, progressive state, the artist has emphasized the freaks in its history – the tornadoes, and John Brown, who did not follow legal procedure."⁷⁰ Upon the end of his project in 1942, Curry claimed, "I sincerely believe that in these fragments, particularly in the panel of John Brown, I have accomplished the greatest painting I have yet done, and they will stand as historic *monuments* [emphasis added]."⁷¹

Tragic Prelude symbolizes John Brown's activity in Kansas more vividly than any statue, obelisk, or park. The honesty of the work made it the artist's proudest piece and it divided the state on how its history and cultural landscape should be rendered. Ironically, and in spite of this resistance and debate, *Tragic Prelude* still hangs in the capitol and John Brown's image marches on.



The previous statement is exactly the point. John Brown's legend has endured time in Kansas, intentionally or not, as a consequence of local manifestations of collective memory. As demonstrated in these case studies, the general public has essentially forgiven his malevolence. However, this has not occurred without contestation over his legend and its reification on the landscape. For each movement in memorialization, there was hesitation and conflict about its purpose and approach.

These narratives, particularly that of the state park in Osawatomie, reflect well what Paul Shackel found in the story of John Brown Fort from his Harper's Ferry raid. The building where Brown took protection during that insurrection was commodified into a tourist attraction, torn down and moved to Chicago for the World's Fair, became a part of Storer College in Harper's Ferry, and eventually was returned to its original site.⁷² The memorials in Kansas likewise reflect instability with his legacy (without, however, the antithetical Confederate memorials in Harper's Ferry). But the constant attention indicates some amount of devotion to his abolitionism.

This chronology also runs parallel with the historic reputational politics of the other figures: Nat Turner, Martin Luther King, Jr., Arthur Ashe, President Warren G. Harding, and Robert E. Lee.⁷³ With exception to Harding, these figures played a role in the experiences of slavery, abolitionism, and civil rights in the United States. The memory of Brown has not only been politicized but also reflects a more "white" interpretation of his memory: ambivalence and indifference towards slavery and abolition in America. It lacks a critical, African American interpretation of these American pasts on the landscape.⁷⁴ The arguments for and against each

memorial, plaque, and monument, resulted in a watered down (and scaled down) representation of Brown on the landscape.

Like John Brown's historical reputation, the monuments to his legend and actions have gone through contestation and, to varying extents, survived public scrutiny and debate. This has occurred with an added layer of judgment by state and federal sources. In turn, historians have written texts and communities have erected landscapes that are in rhythm with each other: we are not sure what exactly to think of John Brown behind the general façade of acceptance.

Therefore, in this case where reputational politics and symbolic accretion collide, a sense of ambivalence results. The debates over these landscapes — their elements of location, text, maintenance, and meaning — have stripped them of their original meaning. In another sense, this is democracy at its best. Neither side has these landscapes exactly the way they want them and a compromise has been reached over time that reflects a divided public sentiment. Reputational politics has defused the process of symbolic accretion.

Conclusion

State dissenters are, normally, not praised for their seditious actions.⁷⁵ Such is not the case with abolitionist John Brown who has landscapes dedicated to his life in New York, West Virginia, Ohio, and Kansas. Of all these places, those in Kansas have never been discussed within the scholarly arena for their meaning despite their importance to the region's landscape and historical identity.

John Brown's position in the heritage of Kansas has been debated ever since he briefly lived in the state 150 years ago. This undulation has created a fascinating landscape when seen through today's interpretation of his past. Several large social processes are nicely illustrated through landscapes built in memory of Brown. These include symbolic accretion in Osawatomie and the reputational politics of public space at all sites. Seemingly, in praise of his actions, the story of this Osawatomie's landscape reveals much more contestation and local boosterism than expected. Other scenes exist in Kansas City and Topeka that are committed to Brown's limited, but intense, impact on the frontier. Quindaro's statue reflects the devotion of African Americans towards his legacy of abolitionism without the strain of its violent accompaniment. John Steuart Curry's statehouse mural, despite cancellation of the larger project, still stands and reifies the disagreement amongst scholars and the general public about Brown's real contribution to the state's history. Taken together, these landscapes point towards more than the disagreement over Brown's legacy. They also reveal that guerrilla warfare is remembered on the landscape in an ambivalent fashion.⁷⁶ If, as James Loewen suggests, Americans like to remember only positive events, then rare individuals like Brown who adopt violence for a positive cause will continue to have their meanings contested.⁷⁷ Their landscapes, through a critical and holistic analysis, will follow suit.

Acknowledgments

Great appreciation goes out to James Shortridge and Derek Alderman who viewed previous versions of this final paper. Thanks also to the editors and reviewers who helped make this publication happen. Finally, I am grateful to the librarians and curators in Topeka, Kansas City, and Osawatomie for their time, effort, and help. Any and all errors are my own. Material in this article will appear in the forthcoming book, *The Memorialization of Guerrilla Warfare: Tales of Preservation of the Trans-Mississippi Frontier* (Chicago: Center for American Places, Columbia College.)

Notes

1. Gary Alan Fine, "John Brown's Body: Elites, Heroic Embodiment, and the Legitimation of Political Violence," *Social Problems* 46 (1999): 225-249; Paul Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003). Shackel dedicates a chapter here to the history of the John Brown Fort from Harper's Ferry fame, and the importance of location in memorialization and preservation.
2. Derek H. Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas: The Reputational Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King Jr. in a Georgia County," *Historical Geography* 30 (2002): 99-120; Gary Alan Fine, "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence: Melting Supporters, Partisan Warriors, and Images of President of Harding," *The Journal of American Sociology* 101 (1996): 1159-1193; Jonathan I. Leib, "Robert E. Lee, 'Race,' Representation and Redevelopment along Richmond, Virginia's Canal Walk," *South-eastern Geographer* 44 (2004): 236-262; Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).
3. Owen Dwyer, "Symbolic Accretion and Commemoration," *Social and Cultural Geography* 5 (2004): 419-435; Kenneth Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
4. Chris Post, "Rejecting Violence on the Landscape in Lawrence, Kansas," *Geographical Review* 99 (2): 186-207.
5. Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).
6. Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 202.
11. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*.
12. Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas," 100; Fine, "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence."
13. Fine, "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence."
14. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1993); David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: New Press, 1996).

15. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.
16. Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Richard H. Schein, ed., *Landscape and Race in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Analyzing such narratives about America's history, and its landscape, is not uncommon. All the recent histories of Brown discuss his evolving legend and its interaction with America's history of racial inequalities. Consider also the analysis of former slave and instigator Nat Turner (French, *The Rebellious Slave*). Due to this convergence of civil rights and the positive acceptance of John Brown's reputation, the analysis of landscapes built in his honor is also a study in landscape, memory, and race. First, Brown's changing reputation has occurred in stride with American race relations. Second, and borrowing from Richard Schein, Brown's landscapes are racialized, reflecting the historic quest for civil rights and the violence that has been taken up against a white majority for that cause. The identity, or lack thereof, of these communities towards his actions can therefore be interpreted as their stance towards the social position of African Americans (Schein, *Landscape and Race*). Because race has historically been a divisive issue in America, so then are the landscapes that reflect leaders of the minority cause throughout American history, including John Brown.
17. Derek H. Alderman, "A Street Fit for a King: naming Places and Commemoration in the American South," *The Professional Geographer* 52 (2000): 672-684; Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas."
18. Jonathan I. Leib, "Separate Times, Shared Spaces: Arthur Ashe, Monument Avenue and the Politics of Richmond, Virginia's Symbolic Landscape," *Cultural Geographies* 9 (2002): 286-312; Leib and Lee, "'Race,' Representation and Redevelopment."
19. Dwyer, "Symbolic Accretion and Commemoration"; Foote, *Shadowed Ground*.
20. Dwyer, "Symbolic Accretion and Commemoration," 420; Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 231-232.
21. Dwyer, "Symbolic Accretion and Commemoration," 425.
22. Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 4.
23. Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 216.
24. Fine, "John Brown's Body."
25. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: New Press 1995), 167; Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood*, 2nd Ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).
26. James Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-six* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1942).
27. *Ibid.*; *Western Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, MO, November 10, 1959).
28. Miner, *Kansas*, 6, 79.
29. "A Refutation of Certain of F.B. Sanborn's Comments," *Boston Traveler*, December 27, 1890, John Brown Scrapbook (Volume 3, 169) Kansas State Historical Society.
30. David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), ix.
31. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood*, ix.
32. Fine, "John Brown's Body."
33. *Ibid.*; James Redpath, *The Public Life of Capt. John Brown* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860).
34. D. O. McCray, "The Women's Relief Corps Working to Preserve Osawatomie

- Battlefield," *Topeka Capital*, April 18, 1909.
35. "John Brown Commemoration at Osawatometie: Place and Proceedings, Speeches and Personalities, Lessons and Inferences," *Lawrence Journal*, September 1, 1877; McCray, "The Women's Relief Corps."
 36. *The National Woman's Relief Corps*, <http://www.suvcw.org/WRC/index.htm>. (accessed November 19, 2008).
 37. "To Buy the Park," *Osawatometie Graphic*, January 7, 1909.
 38. Margaret Hays, *As Constant as the Rivers* (Osawatometie, KS: Osawatometie Museum Foundation, 2004).
 39. Robert S. LaForte, "Theodore Roosevelt's Osawatometie Speech," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 32 (1966): 187-200.
 40. *Ibid.*, 188-190.
 41. Woman's Relief Corps, *Journal of 25th Department Convention of Woman's Relief Corps*, Department of Kansas, Ottawa, May 11-13, 1909: 108.
 42. "Osawatometie Not Dedicated? T.R. Forgot It and Now Old Soldiers Want a Real Ceremony," *Kansas City Journal*, September 6, 1910.
 43. "Park Gate a Beauty," *Osawatometie Graphic*, August 14, 1913.
 44. "John Brown's Body," *Ottawa (KS) Herald*, October 1, 1942.
 45. "Pergola for Brown Cabin," *Topeka Capital*, May 11, 1927.
 46. "Attorney General Issues Opinion on Local Museum," *Osawatometie Graphic*, February 10, 1994.
 47. "John Brown's Body," *Ottawa (KS) Herald*.
 48. U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on National Parks. *Kansas Historic Sites*, 91st Congress (1965), Statute 588; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on National Parks. *Kansas Historic Sites*, 96th Congress (1976), Statute 456.
 49. Martyn J. Bowden, "The Invention of American Tradition," *Journal of Historical Geography* 18 (1992): 3-26; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
 50. James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2004), 92-93, 163.
 51. Kansas State Historical Society, *Fiscal Year Annual Report: 2002-2004*, Topeka, 2004; U.S. Bureau of the Census, "American Fact Finder: Osawatometie, Kansas," http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=Osawatometie&_cityTown=Osawatometie&_state=04000US20&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010 (accessed July 11, 2006).
 52. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "American Fact Finder: Kansas City, Kansas," http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=Kansas+City&_cityTown=Kansas+City&_state=04000US20&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=geoSelect&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=ACS_2006_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&q_r_name=null®=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry= (accessed November 23, 2008).
 53. Alan W. Farley, "Annals of Quindaro: A Kansas Ghost Town," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (1956): 305-320.
 54. *Ibid.*
 55. *Ibid.*
 56. J. E. Alsbrook, "Few See John Brown Statue: Landmark a Victim of Obscurity," *Kansas City Kansan*, December 5, 1962; Joseph A. Lastelic, "Statue of John Brown Stands on a Wyandotte County Bluff," *Kansas City Times*. April 1, 1955.
 57. Alsbrook, "Few See John Brown Statue."
 58. *Ibid.*

59. Edwin Daniel, "At Home for Aged: John Brown Statue Finally Retires," *Kansas City Star*, March 15, 1964.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Debera Weaver Campbell, "Making the Minority Connection," *Planning* 57 (1991): 9.
62. Derek H. Alderman, "Street Names and the Scaling of Memory: The Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr. Within the African American Community," *Area* 35 (2003): 163-173; Owen J. Dwyer, "Location, Politics, and the Production of Civil Rights Memorial Landscapes," *Urban Geography* 23 (2002): 31-56; Leib, "Separate Times, Shared Spaces."
63. Alderman, "Street Names and the Scaling of Memory," 164.
64. Mike Grimm, *Village West and Kansas Speedway Area Economic Review, 2007-2008*, Unified Government (Wyandotte County-Kansas City, KS) Research Division, 2008; Grimm, electronic correspondence with author, November 14, 2008.
65. National Conference of State Legislatures. 2003, "State Capitols and Civic Education," <http://www.ncsl.org/public/capitols.htm#ks2> (accessed: March 29, 2006).
66. Calder M. Pickett, "John Steuart Curry and the Topeka Murals Controversy," *Kansas Quarterly* 2 (1970): 30-41.
67. "Kansas Calls to Curry: Native Artist Receives Belated Recognition," *Kansas City Star*, June 27, 1937.
68. "Sons of Sunflower Strife: Curry's Murals of John Brown Create Storm in Kansas," *Newsweek* 18 (July 7, 1941): 84.
69. *Ibid.*, 58.
70. Robert Townsend, "The John Steuart Curry Murals," *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 11, 1951.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*
73. Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas"; Fine, "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence"; French, *The Rebellious Slave*; Leib, "Separate Times, Shared Spaces"; Leib and Lee, "'Race,' Representation and Redevelopment."
74. Schein *Landscape and Race*.
75. Fine, "John Brown's Body."
76. Post, "Rejecting Violence on the Landscape."
77. James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: New Press, 1999).